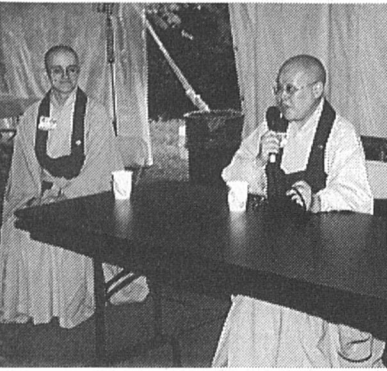


## our school's teaching: how it helps hong kong

*Hyang Um Sunim JDPS, Su Bong Zen Monastery*

*excerpted from a workshop at the Whole World is a Single Flower Conference*



**Myong Hae Sunim:** I will introduce Hyang Um Sunim. Hyang Um Sunim was born in a Muslim family and she studied in a Catholic school. So she understands different religions. After she graduated from school, she went to Thailand and started practicing in Thailand. She was interested in Buddhism and after two years of staying in the forest monastery, she went to the real forest—actually a jungle—and stayed in a cave there for two years. You can imagine the jungle, many trees, big mountain with a very small opening on the side. When you go inside the opening there is a big space inside. It's really nice, I had the pleasure to visit it. I hope I can go again. It's very interesting. You can imagine when you stay in the forest without any electricity, without any running water, no bathroom. Hyang Um Sunim stayed in that cave for two years and afterwards she stayed in the forest and helped her teacher for ten years.

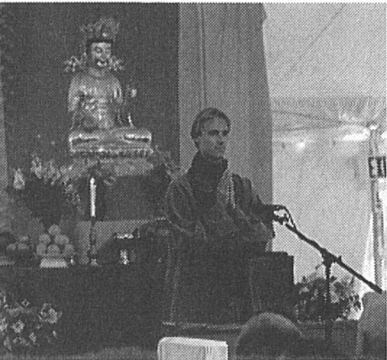


**Hyang Um Sunim JDPS:** My past is not important, but because originally I'm not from the Kwan Um School and I would like to share something with you about how I met Zen Master Seung Sahn and how his teaching is helping Hong Kong and Asia. This is very interesting... being born in a Muslim family and also from the Hinayana school. I studied sutras for four years. I spent ten years in Thailand, mostly in the forest. Where I practiced was a jungle, very far from the city, living in nature. Because of this background I think it was easier to understand Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching. Maybe for a Westerner it's no problem, but for Chinese people to understand our teaching is very difficult.

When our school first went to Hong Kong we had lots of problems. Not because our school has a problem, but because people's minds have a problem. Many people said, "What are you practicing? Why do you wear this style robe?"

I said, "We practice Zen."

Then they'd say, "Oh Zen, Zen is not correct Buddhism. So, why don't you wear the traditional Chinese robes? Why do you follow a Korean master? We already have many great Zen masters in China." A lot of checking. You have to understand, our school is very westernized. Chinese people are oriental. Although they are educated in western society, their mind is very oriental. So they are always checking us. In the beginning when we started the Zen center we only had a few members, maybe five or ten to begin with. These people came to check us, not really to practice. Many people were just arguing. Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching is better or Su Bong Sunim's teaching is better... which one? Many people were concerned about these very trivial things in the beginning. The first few years were very difficult.



Most people in Asia really don't understand our teaching, especially when we teach HIT [*hits floor*]. You know what they say about our school? "That school doesn't teach anything. Anything you ask [*hits floor*]. BOOM! That's what they teach." Then in 1994 a very sad thing happened; Zen Master Su Bong died. After his death half of the students left. Those who remained were very good and were very supportive.

Around that time Zen Master Seung Sahn came to Hong Kong and gave us some very good teaching. He asked me one question, "Is the Zen center OK?" I said "Bad news." He said, "Bad news is good news." I said, "Well, sir, maybe you don't really understand what is going on." He said "So, tell me what is going on." I said, "Yesterday I had a meeting with the owner of the apartment." We were very lucky. We were given an apartment to stay in. That was not our apartment, but somebody just let us stay there without paying any rent. We had been there for three years. I continued, "But people are so engaged in checking that they don't come for the dharma." At that, Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "Don't worry about people coming or not coming to practice. Your practice is very important." So Zen Master Seung Sahn told us to do

1,000 bows every day and a kido every day. "Don't worry about people, whether they like you or don't like you, don't worry about it. You just do it every day, every day then something will happen." So I did that every day and finally it happened. The owner said, "You have to move!"

But I never questioned my teacher. I told him the bad news, "We have to leave the apartment and maybe we won't have a Zen center any more." Then Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "No problem, you make money." "But I'm a nun." In the West, I think it's a little bit different. Here I think monks can go out to work, but in Asia they cannot. So I said, "Sir, how do I make money?" "Seven days, seven nights kido—Hwa Om Soeng Jung. Seven days, seven nights, non-stop, 24 hours a day."

At that time only one student was there but we did the kido anyway. And guess what? Many people came to our kido! Some of them came just to do the kido, they didn't even know us. They just came. Zen Master Seung Sahn said "If you do this kido, some miracle will appear." I never believed in miracles, but I believe in practice. So I only practiced. Miracle? I didn't even want to think about it.

When we began those seven days, we had nothing. Our bank account was less than 100,000 Hong Kong dollars. If you wanted to buy an apartment, it cost more than three million dollars. We did the kido and it was very interesting—many people gave us donations! Many people helped us. Also one woman who is a lawyer in Hong Kong came and said, "How can I help?" She gave her time and her energy. Also her family really supported us. On the fifth day we were able to find an apartment. On the seventh day we were able to borrow the money from the bank, and also we were able to get the money to buy the apartment.

What I'm trying to share is how our teaching connects with our everyday life, especially when you are really facing something.... especially when you have nowhere to go, you have no choice. After we moved, that's when we began our practice, spreading Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching in Hong Kong. After that many people came to practice, many people.

How we use Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching is very important. It's not just mimicking him, oh, the sky is blue, the tree is green. At the beginning our students make this mistake. They come to our Zen center, they learn about Zen and they learn about HIT. So when they go out, they are asked, "What did you learn from the Zen Master? What did the Su Bong Zen Monastery teach you?" They always say "Sky is blue, tree is green, who are you?" Then they HIT. People don't know how this teaching applies to their everyday life.

Zen Master Seung Sahn not only teaches that, he teaches how we apply this teaching in our everyday life.

Actually teaching sutra is very easy. Teaching Hinayana school is very easy. You talk about the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path. But how does this HIT and our teaching function in our everyday life? Practice is very important. Do you understand the twelve dependent originations? Zen Master Seung Sahn always says, mind appears, thinking appears. So how do you cut off this thinking? Practice.

But, practice takes time. Every day we have practicing together, chanting together, but still people have difficulty taking away their suffering. So what we did in Hong Kong is have a *Compass of Zen* teaching class. First teaching Theravadin Buddhism, then Mahayana, and then Zen. If we started with Zen, it would be very difficult.

Some of my students have problems, like cancer, or they are very worried because their husband is divorcing them and some of them are very sad and they don't know what to do; they lose their direction. They come to practice and hear about the dharma. How to put it all down? For example, we might teach them simple breathing exercises. In the beginning, breathing cannot allow you to put it all down. But slowly, slowly, when you do this exercise you get stronger. Every time you have this thinking mind appear or some trouble or some suffering appears, then you try slow breathing from the tantien, then slowly, slowly your energy will come down, come down to your tantien. Because of this, people start to realize later on that they can use this and in doing so they attain don't know mind. In doing that they already attain HIT mind. Then they already are living in the present.

So this is how we teach the Hong Kong people. Our school has many good tools, helping us to teach people. Most important, you must teach yourself first. How to use this practice to help your family, to deal with your everyday life question.

At the beginning in Hong Kong when we talked about being Zen Master Seung Sahn's students, people didn't like that, they didn't even want to look at us, especially other Buddhist groups and societies. So patience—and continued practice—is very important. Also, one thing that I'm quite proud of about our Hong Kong sangha is our strong sense of together action. I think some of our friends who have been to Hong Kong have seen this. It's a live example, not just words. When you're doing something together, "one mind" is very important. Very often in doing things together you can see your karma appear. Every person has a different feeling or a different idea of how things should be done. But in Hong Kong, one thing I quite appreciate, is we did many big projects together. By acting together our teaching becomes an everyday reality.